

# Working off the beaten path: men in traditionally female jobs

*Charlotte M. Irby*

What motivates men to seek a career path in an occupation that is traditionally female? And once there, how long do they stay? If they leave, what are their reasons for exiting?

These are some of the questions that Margarita Torre addresses in her article, [“Stopgappers? The occupational trajectories of men in female-dominated occupations”](#) (*Work and Occupations*, June 2018). To find the answers to these questions, Torre looks at men’s working history in the United States from 1979 to 2006. She identifies a group of men she classifies as “stopgappers” who entered traditionally female job fields and left shortly after. Torre theorizes that the stopgappers entering and then quickly exiting these fields may contribute to a new source of inequality of these female-dominated occupations—inequality between men in high-status, female-dominated positions and those in low-status positions.

According to Torre, the entering of men into female-dominated job fields has risen little since 1980, from 8.0 percent to 9.5 percent. She suggests that men perceive these fields as having limited incentives, with low pay and lower social status than male-dominated fields, and that those men who do enter them may see themselves as tokens, with a better chance of quickly moving up the career ladder. However, the author’s findings show that attrition of men newly entering these jobs is inconsistent.

Stopgappers are quicker to exit than men already working in the jobs and women exiting nontraditional female jobs. The author lists several possible reasons for the quick departures. One reason is that male-dominated occupations are more abundant, often offering better opportunities, such as higher pay and more frequent promotions. Another reason is that the men in female-dominated jobs may be stereotyped—they may be labeled as less manly or gay.

However, for most workers in higher managerial and professional female occupations, attitudes have become more “liberal” than in low-status female-dominated jobs. Torre states that because of these liberal attitudes, more men are remaining in these high-status jobs. She contends that this trend may decrease gender inequality in some jobs. Low-status traditionally female occupations, on the other hand, are still viewed as women’s jobs, and men in these positions often feel highly stigmatized socially. Thus, these positions continue to be highly segregated. The author suggests that identifying the deterrents that dissuade men from entering female-dominated jobs and eliminating them should help increase gender equality in the workforce.